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ABSTRACT

Two studies investigated inductively the verbal immediacy construct in the interpersonal context. Specifically, the studies explored whether or not verbal immediacy is an autonomous and distinct linguistic verbal code that people use to approach and avoid relationship formation, or part of a much larger repertoire of verbal relational strategies that are situated in everyday conversation. Subjects in the first study were 355 students in communication studies courses at a Mid-Atlantic university. Data collected were folded into a survey instrument containing 19 verbal approach/avoidance categories and administered to another 448 students in communication studies courses at the same university. Much of what was yielded were verbal strategies rather than a verbally immediate linguistic code people employ to approach or avoid relationship formation. An explanation is presented as to why these verbal approach and avoidance strategies do not constitute verbal immediacy but instead consititute a measure of relational approach and avoidance. Frequency of approach and avoidance use, correlational analysis, and recommendations for the measures are offered. (Contains 22 references, 3 tables, and 2 figures of data.) (Author/RS)

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An Inductive Analysis of Verbal Immediacy: Alternative Conceptualization of Relational Verbal Approach/Avoidance Strategies

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An Inductive Analysis of Verbal Immediacy: Alternative Conceptualization of Relational Verbal Approach/Avoidance Strategies

Abstract

These two studies inductively investigated the verbal immediacy construct in the interpersonal context. Specifically, this research explored whether or not verbal immediacy is an autonomous and distinct linguistic verbal code that people use to approach and avoid relationship formation, or part of a much larger repertoire of verbal relational strategies that are situated in everyday conversation. Much of what was yielded in these two studies were verbal strategies rather than a verbally immediate linguistic code people employ to approach or avoid relationship formation. An argument is presented as to why these verbal approach and avoidance strategies do not comprise verbal immediacy and instead comprise a measure of relational approach and avoidance. Frequency of approach and avoidance use, correlational analysis, and recommendations for the measure are offered.

Key Concepts: Verbal immediacy, approach/avoidance verbal strategies, nonverbal immediacy, linguistic code.

An Inductive Analysis of Verbal Immediacy: Alternative Conceptualization of Relational Verbal Approach/Avoidance Strategies

Nonverbal immediacy has received much attention in the past two decades especially in the instructional context. It has been found to have a positive impact on students. Specifically, nonverbal immediacy has been associated with increases in affective learning (Andersen, 1979), perceived cognitive learning (Richmond et al., 1987), recall of information (Kelly & Gorham, 1988), and motivation (Christophel, 1990). Receiving less attention has been the construct of verbal immediacy. In fact there has been some speculation that verbal immediacy is only a linguistic code that has limited utility in the study of human communication (Robinson & Richmond, 1995). The purpose of the following two studies was to explore inductively Mehrabian's (1971) construct of verbal immediacy via an examination of the various verbal strategies people use to approach and avoid relationship formation.

Immediacy. Immediacy was conceptualized by Mehrabian (1971) as behavior that communicates approachability and closeness between interactants. His research suggests that reducing perceived distance—physical and/or psychological— in a communication exchange increases affect for the source of the communication. Immediacy is based on the conceptual framework of approach-avoidance principles. In other words, "people are drawn toward persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer, and they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer" (Mehrabian, 1971, p. 1).

Verbal immediacy. The immediacy construct has yielded two strains of research—nonverbal and verbal. Since nonverbal immediacy has been shown to be a potent predictor of student learning, it has been suggested that the verbal dimension of communication may have some of the same predictive power. With the paucity of research in verbal immediacy, this claim has not been supported. Mottet and Patterson

(1996) addressed some of the possible theoretical differences between the two dimensions of immediacy, however their research remains preliminary.

Mehrabian refers to verbal immediacy as the "degree of directness and intensity of interaction between communicator and referent in a communicator's linguistic message" (Mehrabian, 1966, p. 28). An example of an immediate linguistic message might include a statement where the demonstrative pronoun reflects distance-near rather than distance-far. "These people need help" is an example of the former and "Those people need help" is an example of the latter. Studies have shown that negative experiences are referenced with greater nonimmediate linguistic messages than more positive experiences (Conville, 1974). Similarly, Bradac, Bowers, and Courtright (1979) concluded, after reviewing much of the social psychological literature that examined verbal immediacy from a linguistic perspective rather than from a communication research perspective, that positive verbal immediacy is associated with positive perceptions of the intended receiver, that receivers perceive verbal immediacy as a sign of high affect, and that verbal immediacy is directly related to receiver judgments of source competence and character.

Gorham (1988) examined verbal immediacy in the instructional communication context. Her measure of verbal immediacy contained behaviors that were student generated. Some of the items included: uses personal examples or talks about experiences she/he has had outside of class, uses humor in class, addresses students by name, asks questions that solicit viewpoints or opinions, etc. Gorham's measure was found to produce results similar to those involving nonverbal immediacy, however the validity of the measure was challenged by Robinson and Richmond (1995). Their criticism centered around the items that comprised the scale. Students were asked to generate specific behaviors which characterized some of the best teachers they had been exposed to during their years in school. According to Robinson and Richmond, "[t]he product of this item-generation process was items representing verbally effective teacher behaviors, not necessarily verbally immediate behaviors. The face validity of the scale, therefore, is for a

scale measuring teacher effectiveness, not a scale measuring teacher immediacy" (p. 81). The authors further recommended that the scale not be used until a stronger case for its validity could be established. As it stands, a reconceptualization of the verbal immediacy construct and its measurement are needed.

This questioning of the verbal immediacy construct also raises the question as to whether or not verbal immediacy is a construct that can be detected and identified by participants in an interpersonal communication context. Weiner and Mehrabian (1968) studied verbal immediacy from a linguistic rather than a communication perspective and, unlike nonverbal immediacy where the variables were low inference and easier to identify (i.e., bodily movements, facial expression), verbal immediacy involved high inference variables (i.e., use of pronouns and verb tenses) that were harder to detect.

Weiner and Mehrabian (1968) developed a procedure for analyzing linguistic immediacy which involved dividing language samples into clauses and scoring them based on the presence of any of nine classes of nonimmediacy features. Verbal immediacy was operationalized through a category scoring system which took into account distance, time, order, duration, activity/passivity, probability, and part/class of the communicator/object of communication. When subjects were offered identical pairs of statements, the more immediate statement of the pair was judged as expressing a greater degree of liking, positive evaluation, or preference towards the object of communication (Mehrabian, 1967, p. 416). Non-immediate verbalizations have been found to correspond to more negative communicator attitudes than immediate ones (Mehrabian, 1966). Gorham (1988) found this verbal-linguistic methodology problematic. Her subjects found it easy to identify the low inference nonverbal immediate behaviors but found it extremely difficult to monitor the higher inference verbal immediate behaviors.

Unlike nonverbal immediacy which has been shown to have utility across communication contexts, verbal immediacy's utility appears to be limited to a linguistic-

situated context. Verbal immediacy was originally studied as a way for therapists and psychologists to assess clients' hidden attitudes. Verbal immediacy was a way for a therapist to decode the linguistic message of a patient in order to allow them to uncover patients' "real" attitudes, beliefs, and values (Mehrabian, 1967). In the interpersonal communication context, perhaps verbal immediacy is nothing more than another typology of relational maintenance strategies much like those developed by Cody (1982), Ayres (1983), and Canary et al. (1993). Instead of the source linguistically selecting the appropriate words that will generate perceptions of closeness, the source relies on scripted verbal strategies that are encapsulated in everyday talk. According to Duck (1996), talk is the essence of relational maintenance. "Talk maintains relationship by presenting symbolic evidence to the partners that the two of them share an appreciation of the relationship and that they also happen to approach important experiences in similar ways" (p. 163).

Purpose of research. This exploratory research was designed to examine the verbal immediacy construct. Specifically, this research explored whether or not verbal immediacy is an autonomous and distinct linguistic verbal code that people use to approach and avoid relationship formation or part of a much larger repertoire of verbal relational strategies that are situated in everyday conversation. Some of the questions undergirding this research include: What is it that people say in everyday conversations that communicates approachability and avoidance? According to Mehrabian's (1966) definition of verbal immediacy, are these verbal messages considered "immediate" and "nonimmediate? If so, do people use these verbal "immediate" and "nonimmediate" behaviors to accelerate and retard relationship formation? And can people use verbal immediacy as a relational maintenance strategy to complement and/or augment some of the existing relationship research such as Schutz (1960) and Knapp (1978)?

Study One

The first study was designed to examine inductively the verbal immediacy construct in regards to the approaching and avoiding of relationship formation. Specifically, the first study in this investigation explored verbal immediacy as a possible relational maintenance strategy. The first research question asked the following:

RQ1: What are the various verbal strategies one employs when approaching or avoiding relationship development?

Method

Data Collection

In order to answer the first research question, an inductive methodology was employed. A total of 355 students in communication studies courses at a Mid-Atlantic university were provided with one of two general instruction sheets that introduced verbal immediacy and approach/avoidance verbal strategies. These instruction sheets contained the following introductions:

1. (Approach) This exercise deals with a communication concept called Verbal Immediacy. Verbally immediate behaviors are those communication behaviors that reduce psychological distance between people. In other words, it is the verbal communication that causes us to feel "close" to another person.
2. (Avoidance) This exercise deals with a communication concept called Verbal Immediacy. Verbally immediate behaviors are those communication behaviors that reduce psychological distance between people. In other words, it is the verbal communication that causes us to feel "close" to another person. On the flip side, verbally non-immediate behaviors are those communication behaviors that increase psychological distance between people. This type of verbal communication causes us to feel "distant" and "removed" from the communicator.

Three versions of each of the approach/avoidance general introductions were written in order to tap into the various verbal messages employed by different

communication sources including self, teacher, and peer/friend. One of the following specific instructions were added to each of the two aforementioned general introductions respective of the approach/avoidance condition: (1) What would you say that probably makes others feel "closer" to you? (2) What do your teachers say that make you feel "closer" to them? (3) What do your friends/peers say that make you feel "closer" to them? (4) What do you say that probably makes others feel more "distant" or "removed" from you? (5) What do your teachers say that make you feel "distant" or "removed" from them? or (6) What do your friends/peers say that make you feel "distant" or "removed" from them? Another reason for the various instructions was to see if participants could not only identify what they might say to make others feel close (or distant), but also to see if participants could detect in others' messages, words that stimulated close/distant meanings.

Following both the general introductions and the specific instructions describing either the approach or avoidance condition with either self, teacher, or peer/friend as message source, participants were asked to reflect on the question and then respond in the blank space provided. There were 172 males and 183 females providing data in the first study.

Data Analysis

Research participants generated a total of 360 unique verbal strategies/messages excluding all duplicate responses. These responses included 185 approach verbal statements and 175 avoidance verbal statements. Independent of each other, the authors reviewed each of the 360 verbal statements and developed a classification typology for the approach/avoidance verbal strategies/messages. This classification process included developing a series of descriptive categorical labels and placing within each of these categories a representation of the verbal strategies/messages that were generated by research participants. Individually, the authors developed almost identical typologies however different categorical labels were used to describe the various verbal

strategies/messages. Collectively, the authors collapsed their individual typologies into 12 approach verbal categories comprising 122 representative verbal strategies/messages and seven avoidance categories comprising 81 representative strategies/messages. A neutral third person not affiliated with the research study was then asked to classify the verbal statements into the 19 verbal categories. Over 90% of the overall 203 verbal strategies/messages were properly classified into the various approach/avoidance verbal categories.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the data provided by the respondents yielded a typology (see Figure 1) of approach/avoidance verbal strategies.

Insert Figure 1 About Here

This typology of verbal strategies and messages suggests that what was generated in Study One were not examples of verbal immediacy. Instead, this typology reflects approach and avoidance verbal "strategies" and not text-based verbal messages that people use to approach and avoid relationship formation. There are two possible reasons to support this conclusion. The first reason centers on Mehrabian's original conception of verbal immediacy as a diagnostic tool that was used in the therapeutic context to uncover latent attitudes, values, and beliefs. He conceptualized verbal immediacy from the receiver's perspective and not as an intentional source-generated communication strategy that communicates psychological closeness among interactants. The three different instruction sheets that were administered to all research participants were designed in order to assess both source and other generated messages. The data that were generated from these alternating instructions clearly did not yield any differences among the self or other generated approach/avoidance strategies and messages. Based on Mehrabian's conception of verbal immediacy, it can be argued that research participants should have

been able to produce, from the receiver's perspective, actual text-based verbal messages that stimulate psychological closeness and distance, and that these messages may differ from the source perspective. Instead, almost identical verbal strategies were generated with few text-based messages being produced.

The second reason why this typology of verbal strategies and messages is not representative of verbal immediacy may be that language is contextually situated. Research participants were asked to respond to either an approach or avoidance question: "What would you say to make others feel close (or distant) to you?" or "What do others say that makes you feel close (or distant) to them?" It appears that many of the participants found these questions difficult to answer. Instead of responding in a linguistic manner with the actual text of their conversations, many participants instead responded with verbal strategies. To increase closeness, some of the participants indicated that they would try to remember something from a prior conversation and then refer to it in the current conversation. It appears that participants operationalized closeness both as a sender and a receiver in terms of content rather than linguistic nuances. In fact it could probably be argued that humans do not have a linguistic schema for closeness and instead take verbal cues from the context to construct verbal strategies that cultivate closeness/distance. It should be noted that a few research participants did generate verbal messages that incorporated the inclusive pronouns "we" and "us" and exclusive pronoun "you." Missing from the typology, however, was any evidence that research participants were aware of the other linguistic nuances such as time, order, duration, activity/passivity, probability, part/class identified by Weiner and Mehrabian (1968). Additional evidence that suggests that Mehrabian's linguistic nuances of verbal immediacy are undetectable to an untrained ear was reported in Mottet and Patterson (1996) where subjects failed to identify the linguistic features of paired combinations of statements where pronouns had been altered to reflect approach and avoidance situations.

The results from study one served as a springboard to Study Two which further examined the verbal immediacy construct in terms of the relational approach and avoidance verbal strategies and messages inductively generated from this study.

Study Two

The second study was designed to further test the items comprising the typology for frequency of use in addition to exploring the approach and avoidance verbal strategies with other communication variables. Specifically, the following two research questions were posited.

RQ2: Which verbal relational strategies are employed most often in approach and avoidance situations?

RQ3: What are the relationships between use of the relational approach and avoidance verbal strategies and other communication variables such as assertiveness, responsiveness, and willingness to communicate (WTC).

Method

Data Collection

The data collected from Study One were folded into a survey instrument containing 19 verbal approach/avoidance categories (see Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 About Here

Each category was represented with a descriptive statement explaining the verbal category along with verbal messages that represented the verbal category. The twelve approach verbal categories included: Ritualistic, Self-Disclosure, Caring/Appreciation, Character, Responsiveness, Personal Recognition, Humor, Complimentary, Closeness/Inclusiveness, Honesty, Willingness to Communicate, and Language Appropriateness. The seven avoidance verbal categories included: Nonpersonal Recognition, Abrupt, Task, Distant/Exclusive, Unresponsive, Offensive, and

Condescension. The respondents were asked to indicate (0=Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Occasionally, 3=Often, 4=Very Often) how frequently they used each of the verbal approach/avoidance strategies which were altered throughout the survey. Two survey instruments were designed. The questions remained identical, however the instructions were altered to reflect an approach or avoidance condition. The surveys contained the following instructions:

1. (Approach) You recently met someone who you find very interesting. You decided that you would like to pursue some type of a relationship with this person. Which of the following verbal behaviors are you more likely to use in order to develop this potential new relationship.
2. (Avoidance) You recently met someone who finds you very interesting. Unfortunately, your feelings are not mutual. This person decides that he/she would like to pursue some type of relationship with you. Which of the following verbal behaviors are your more likely to use in order to keep this relationship from forming.

The survey instrument also included the Socio-Communicative Style scale (Richmond & McCroskey, 1990), the Willingness to Communicate (WTC) scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987), and various demographic questions including age and gender. This package was administered to another 448 students in communication studies courses at the same Mid-Atlantic university as in Study One, but in a subsequent semester. Completing the survey in an approach condition were 225 respondents and completing in the avoidance condition were 223 respondents. There were 198 males and 241 females in the sample. Nine respondents failed to indicate their gender. The mean age was 20.

Data Analysis

The second research question was answered by computing the mean scores for the 19 approach/avoidance items. In order to support the argument that verbal immediacy is a

linguistic construct with limited utility in the field of communication, and also a construct that is non-detectable in interpersonal communication, three post-hoc analyses were conducted to examine further the approach/avoidance verbal strategies. The first post-hoc analysis included a multivariate analysis of variance. This analysis was conducted to determine how much variance among the collective 19 items was attributable to group membership (determined by the approach or avoidance condition presented in the survey instructions.)

The second post-hoc analysis included a series of individual analyses of variance among the 19 items to assess how much variance in each item was attributable to group membership. This type of analysis allowed for a better assessment among the approach/avoidance items as to their strength in terms of being used in an approach or avoidance situation. If the individual item accounted for minimal variance, then the item could possibly be discredited as neither an approach or avoidance verbal strategy.

The third post-hoc analysis included subjecting the 19 items to a factor analysis to determine if the items formed a single factor that could be labeled verbal immediacy. A liberal criterion of an eigenvalue of 1.0 was set for termination of factor extraction. Both orthogonal and oblique rotational analyses were examined. In addition, the unrotated analysis was examined. A minimum loading of .50 was set for considering an item loaded on a factor.

A discriminant function analysis was performed as a manipulation check. Based on the set of instructions the research respondents received, they were to complete the survey items from either an approach or avoidance situational context. Over 96% (n=216) of the approach situation participants were properly placed in the approach group and over 93% (205) of the avoidance situation participants were properly placed in the avoidance group. The data from this analysis demonstrated that the research respondents properly interpreted and followed the survey instructions.

To answer the third research question, a series of Pearson correlations were computed in order to determine the relationships between the approach and avoidance verbal strategies and other communication variables (assertiveness, responsiveness, and willingness to communicate). Believing that not all of the 19 items were of equal value, the correlations were computed using both weighted and unweighted items. The weighted items were weighted by multiplying the individual item by the variance that was attributable to group membership.

Results

The second research question asked which verbal relational strategies were employed most often in approach and avoidance situations. The approach strategy that was employed most often in the approach condition was the use of ritualistic statements ($\underline{M}$ = 3.17, $\underline{SD}$ = .73) and the least often cited approach strategy was the use of self-disclosive communication ($\underline{M}$ = 1.84, $\underline{SD}$ = .91). The most often cited avoidance strategy in the avoidance condition was task-only communication ($\underline{M}$ = 2.49, $\underline{SD}$ = .92) and the avoidance strategy used least often was offensive communication ($\underline{M}$ = .63, $\underline{SD}$ = .90). The means and standard deviations for all 19 items are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 About Here

The total mean scores for those respondents instructed to complete the survey in an approach condition and those instructed to complete in an avoidance condition are also presented in Table 1. Note that these totals are for the retained 14 items rather than the initial 19 survey items. Five of the initial survey items were deleted from the analysis and this deletion will be discussed in subsequent paragraphs. These totals were computed using reflected scores (see Figure 2 for reflected items) where a high total score indicates a greater use of approach strategies and a lesser use of avoidance strategies. Similarly, a low total score indicates a minimal use of approach strategies and a higher use of

avoidance strategies. The variance for each item was computed to determine the amount of variance that was attributable to group membership. The F-values along with individual item variance are displayed in Table 1. This analysis identified five items (2, 10, 12, 13, 17) with minimal (< .10) variance associated with group to which participants were assigned (approach or avoidance).

When the 19 items were subjected to a multivariate analysis of variance with group membership serving as the independent variable and the 19 items serving as dependent variables, the analysis yielded a significant Wilks' Lambda of .26 [$F(19,422) = 61.8$, $p < .0001$] where 74% of the variance among the collective 19 items was attributable to group membership.

When the 19 items were factor analyzed, the unrotated factor pattern yielded a single factor with the exception of five items. Two of these items (2, 17) failed to load on either of the two factors generated and three of the items (10, 12, 13) loaded on the second factor. However, these three items like the preceding two were earlier identified in the analysis of variance as having minimal variance associated with approach/avoidance inductions. These five items were deleted from the analysis and the remaining 14 items were again factor analyzed. This analysis generated an unrotated single factor pattern where all 14 items had their highest loading on the first factor with 61% of the variance being accounted for. Factor loadings can be seen in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 About Here

In order to assess the reliability of the remaining 14 items, three Cronbach alphas were computed. Again, believing that not all of the items were necessarily of equal value, the items were weighted before the reliability assessments were computed. The first reliability assessment was computed using items that had been weighted using the amount of variance on each item that was predictable by the approach/avoidance

condition. This resulted in an alpha of .74. The second reliability was computed using items that had been weighted using the individual factor loadings. This resulted in an alpha of .75. Additionally, the unweighted raw variable reliability was computed and this generated an alpha of .95. From this three-part reliability assessment, it appears that the 14 items are of equal value and the unweighted scoring was superior for the verbal approach and avoidance items. It is recommended that future research using these items as a measure of approach/avoidance in relationship development use the unweighted items when computing the scores. Future scale development and application is discussed below in the Summary section.

The third research question asked about the relationship between the individual approach and avoidance items and various communication variables. These correlations are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 About Here

It appears that most of the approach verbal strategies were negatively correlated with the assertiveness communication variable and all of the avoidance verbal strategies were negatively correlated with the responsiveness communication variable. Although many of the item correlations with the assertiveness variable remained significant, the correlations were minimal. The correlations with the responsiveness variable, although still somewhat low, remained higher than those reported for the assertiveness dimension of socio-communicator style. The willingness to communicate (WTC) variable generally was uncorrelated with the approach/avoidance items.

To extend this correlational analysis, two new variables were added to the analysis. The first variable was the unreflected total for the original 19 items and the second was the reflected totals for the retained 14 items. The unreflected total represents the respondents' dispositional behavioral tendencies to use both the approach and

avoidance items. The reflected total represents the respondents' tendencies to approach or avoid relationship formation primarily through a function of using approach and not using avoidance strategies. From the data in Table 3, it appears that three of the five items that were deleted in the preceding analyses (2, 10, 12) were comparatively unrelated to the unreflected total variable comprising the original 19 items. However, it should be noted that the other two approach items (13, 17) that were deleted from the final analysis did produce a low to moderate correlation with the unreflected total. Interesting to this analysis are two additional avoidance items (4, 8) that were retained, but were generally unrelated to the unreflected total. In terms of the reflected total variable comprising the retained 14 items, the five deleted items all had correlations that were comparatively weak revealing a small relationship with the reflected total. The remaining 14 items all had strong correlations (.52 to .90) with the total reflected score.

Discussion

The individual and summed mean scores in Table 1 suggest that when people want a relationship to develop, they engage in one or several of the approach verbal strategies inductively yielded from the first study. Of the ten approach items, all but one (self-disclosure) yielded mean scores above the median split in regards to frequency of use, and five of these items were used "often." The data also suggest that when people want to keep a relationship from forming, instead of using the avoidance strategies they primarily decrease their level of approach communication strategies. In other words, instead of using a negative avoidance strategy, people just refrain from communicating with the other person. It should noted, however, that two of the remaining four avoidance strategies (task-only and unresponsive) yielded mean scores above the median split. One possible explanation for the somewhat limited use of avoidance strategies in an avoidance situation may be the result of social desirability. Two of the verbal avoidance strategies, on the surface, appeared offensive (abrupt and exclusionary). The remaining two avoidance strategies (task-only and unresponsive) that were used "occasionally" were

more socially desirable and palatable to someone wanting to avoid relationship development. Another explanation may be that "people are drawn toward persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer, and they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer" (Mehrabian, 1971, p. 1). Being "drawn toward" requires communication, avoidance may not.

Interesting to the on-going verbal immediacy debate are the five items that individually contributed minimal variance in regards to the approach or avoidance group membership, and subsequently failed to load in the factor analysis. The five items that appeared to be neither an approach or avoidance verbal strategy and failed to load on the theorized "verbal immediacy" factor were personal recognition, humor, offensive, condescension, and honesty. One of the verbal immediacy items that has served as a benchmark in the communication literature has been personally recognizing someone by appropriately using his or her name (Gorham, 1988). Humor has also been cited as a teacher verbal immediacy behavior that enhances psychological closeness between interactants (Gorham, 1988; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Mottet & Patterson, 1996). What is called into question here is the "theorized" verbal immediacy unidimensional factor that was yielded in the factor analysis. If what was being factor analyzed was verbal immediacy, then a priori research suggests that these two items theoretically should have loaded. Since both of these items were considered neither an approach nor avoidance verbal strategy based on the amount of variance that was attributable to group membership, and since they failed to load onto the factor, the results suggest that what was being measured was simply approach and avoidance verbal strategies and not necessarily verbal immediacy. The remaining three items (offensive, condescension, honesty) that failed to load or had their heaviest loading on the second factor were clearly an "offensiveness" factor which was often overlooked as a possible avoidance strategy.

From the data, it appears that the approach and avoidance verbal items were unrelated to the willingness to communicate (WTC) and assertiveness communication

variables, and only somewhat correlated with the responsiveness variable. Another interesting finding here is the direction of the relationships. Apparently when avoidance strategies are employed, responsive people use less of them and assertive people use more when confronted with relational possibilities. It seems plausible that responsive people, unlike assertive individuals, may shy way from using the avoidance strategies, which on their face value appear socially undesirable. Being only an exploratory study, this correlational analysis was not probed. Future research should examine other possible correlates of this verbal communication variable. Given the size of the observed correlations, it would appear that use of approach/avoidance relational strategies may be primarily situated rather than trait-based behavior. This speculation should be examined in a more naturalistic context in future research.

Summary of Studies

The data from these studies question the importance and legitimacy of verbal immediacy as a construct in communication research. It has been theorized that people use a text-based linguistic code in their communication to reduce psychological distance between interactants (Mehrabian, 1971). The data from these studies support the notion that people use a variety of approach verbal strategies which are not a linguistic code when they want to pursue a relationship. What is more interesting perhaps is that instead of using avoidance verbal strategies to retard relationship formation, people primarily just reduce using approach verbal strategies. Although embedded in some of these verbal strategies and messages were linguistic nuances such as "we" versus "I", most of what was yielded in these studies were verbal strategies rather than actual scripted, text-based messages that people employ to approach or avoid relationship formation. While some aspects of immediacy may be recognized by clinical experts in people's verbal communication, there does not appear to be any substantial volitional use of such communication. These studies failed to generate a specific approach and avoidance linguistic code. In fact, it appears that most respondents employ a nonverbal linguistic

code of silence when they want to avoid relationship formation. If verbal immediacy exists linguistically, it does not appear to be consciously employed. We do not deny the potential value of linguistic analysis in clinical psychology, we do, however, suggest such a "verbal immediacy" approach to the study of communication is of minimal utility.

Working with a communication-situated approach/avoidance verbal variable, rather than the linguistic-situated verbal immediacy variable, offers new avenues for communication research. The unidimensional 14-item factor comprising the verbal approach and avoidance strategies, with its reliability assessment of .95, may serve as a foundation for a new verbal communication measure. Although the measure could be used as a self-report, we suggest that it may have more utility as an other-report in the interpersonal, organizational, and instructional arenas. It can be argued that if the measure yields a high score, then there is relationship potential. Similarly, it can be argued that if the measure yields a low score, then the possibility of a relationship developing remains minimal. This score reflects what has often been attributed to intuition—that a relationship is out of the question.

In the organizational setting where group and dyadic communication are becoming more important, the measure may be employed as a tool to gauge how employees are relating. Early detection of relational problems may cue the need to initiate some form of intervention. Another application for this potential new measure may be in the instructional setting. The nonverbal immediacy construct has been examined extensively in this context and has been shown to be a potent predictor of student learning. Teachers' use of verbal approach and avoidance strategies may have some of the same predictive power as nonverbal immediacy, or they may influence learning outcomes indirectly by "optimizing" the immediacy effect.

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Figure 1
Verbal Approach/Avoidance Categories and Strategies/Messages

Approach Category	Verbal Strategies/Messages
1. Personal Recognition	Use direct references and personal recognition when communicating by remembering something from a prior conversation and referring to it, by remembering something unique about him/her, or by saying such things as "I wish you could have been there. . ." and "I thought about you when. . ."
2. Humor	Use humor by joking and kidding around and giving him/her a hard time. Use of inside jokes.
3. Ritualistic	Use ritualistic statements by saying such things as "Hey, what's up?" "Hi, how are you doing?" "Hope to see you soon." "Take care."
4. Closeness/Inclusiveness	Use communication that includes him/her by talking about things we have in common or talking about things we have done together or by saying such things as "Do you want to go with us," and "We should go out sometime." Dominant use of "we" and "us" pronouns throughout the conversation.
5. Self-Disclosure	Use self-disclosive statements such as telling him/her something I wouldn't tell others, revealing personal stories about my life, and telling him/her my thoughts, worries, and problems.
6. Character	Use statements that address his/her character by saying such things as "I trust you," "I respect you," "You're dependable," "What do you think?" and "How do you feel about. . .?"
7. Willingness to Communicate	Use communication in a way that reveals that I am willing to communicate and that I want to continue communicating by saying such things as "I will call you tonight," and "When will I hear from you again?"
8. Language Appropriateness	Use language that he/she understands—language that does not sound superior, over his/her head, or language that is not condescending or "talking down" to him/her. Use of more informal conversational language.
9. Honesty	Use communication that is honest by saying such things in a "straight forward manner" or by telling the truth when he/she asks me a question.

10. Complimentary	Use praise, complimentary, and encouraging statements such as "You look nice today," "You have a good sense of humor," "I have fun with you," and "You do good work, keep it up."
11. Responsiveness	Use responsive statements such as "I understand how you feel," "Go on, please continue," and "Tell me more, I want to listen."
12. Caring/Appreciation	Express caring and appreciation by saying such things as "I'm here for you," "I care about you," "I'm glad we're friends," and "I value our friendship."

Avoidance Category	Verbal Strategies/Messages
1. Nonpersonal Recognition	Use references that fail to recognize person by not using his/her name/nickname, by mispronouncing his/her name/nickname, or by referring to him/her as "you."
2. Abrupt	Use abrupt communication by interrupting and changing subject, and by answering his/her questions with simple, short, and curt "yes/no" answers.
3. Task	Use only task-oriented communication by keeping all communication "strictly business" and never engaging in "small talk." "Let's skip the small talk and get right to business."
4. Distant/Exclusive	Use exclusionary communication by discussing things he/she can't relate to and things he/she finds uninteresting, by using slang, jargon, that he/she doesn't understand, or by talking about people that he/she hasn't met or places he/she hasn't visited.
5. Offensive	Use offensive communication by making ugly jokes and derogatory comments about his/her ethnicity/religion/race/sex. Use inappropriate profanity.
6. Condescension	Use condescending communication by saying such things as "You don't know what you're talking about," "You're ideas are stupid," "Why are you acting like that?" "You wouldn't understand," "You boys," and "You girls."
7. Unresponsive	Use communication that is unresponsive by saying such things as "I don't have time now," "I'm tired," "Can you call me back," "Another time, OK?"

Figure 2

Verbal Approach/Avoidance Survey Items

1. Use ritualistic statements by saying such things as "Hey, what's up?" "Hi, how are you doing?" "Take care," "Be careful," "I'll call and talk to you soon," and "Hope to see you soon."

2.* Use references that fail to recognize the individual person by not using his/her name/nickname, by mispronouncing his/her name/nickname, or by referring to him/her as "you."

3. Use self-disclosive statements such as telling him/her something I wouldn't tell others, revealing personal stories about my life, and telling him/her my thoughts, worries, and problems.

4.* Use discourteous and abrupt communication by interrupting and changing the subject, using inappropriate profanity, and by answering his/her questions with simple, short "YES/NO" answers.

5. Express caring and appreciation by saying such things as "I'm here for you," "I care about you," "I'm glad we're friends," and "I value our friendship."

6.* Use only task-oriented communication by keeping all communication "strictly business" and never engaging in small talk or self-disclosive communication.

7. Use statements that address his/her character by saying such things as "I trust you," "I respect you," "You're dependable," "What do you think?" and "How do you feel about. . . ?"

8.* Use exclusionary communication by discussing things he/she can't relate to and things he/she finds uninteresting, by using slang, jargon, tech-talk (shop-talk) that he/she doesn't understand, or by talking about people that he/she hasn't met or places he/she hasn't visited.

9. Use responsive statements such as "I understand how you feel," "Go on, please continue," "Tell me more, I want to listen."

10.* Use offensive communication by making ugly jokes and derogatory comments about his/her ethnicity/religion/race/sex.

11. Use direct references and personal recognition when communicating by remembering something from a prior conversation and referring to it, by remembering something unique about him/her, or by saying such things as "I wish you could have been there. . ." and "I thought about you when. . ."

12.* Use condescending communication by saying such things as "You don't know what you're talking about," "You're ideas are stupid," "Why are you acting like that," "You wouldn't understand," "You boys," and "You girls."

13. Use humor by joking and kidding around and giving him/her a hard time.

14.* Use communication that is unresponsive by saying such things as "I don't have time now," "I'm tired," "Can you call me back," "Another time, OK?"

15. Use praise, complimentary, and encouraging statements such as "You look nice today," "You have a good sense of humor," "I have a lot of fun with you," and "You do good work, keep it up."

16. Use communication that includes him/her by talking about things we have in common or talking about things we have done together or by saying such things as "Do you want to go with us," and "We should go out sometime."

17. Use communication that is honest by saying things in a straight forward manner or by telling the truth when he/she asks me a question.

18. Use language that he/she understands—language that does not sound superior, over his/her head, or language that is not condescending or "talking down" to him/her.

19. Use communication in a way that reveals that I am willing to communicate and that I want to continue communicating by saying such things as "I will call you tonight," and "When will I hear from you again?"

Note: *Avoidance item scores were reflected for analyses.

Table 1

Mean Use, F-Value, and Variance of Verbal Approach/Avoidance Strategies/Messages

Items	Approach Condition M	SD	Avoidance Condition M	SD	F	R^2
1. AP	3.17	.73	2.01	1.06	179.45	.29
2. AV	1.12	.80	1.52	1.01	21.29	.05
3. AP	1.84	.91	.69	.84	190.43	.30
4. AV	.75	.79	1.78	1.14	122.51	.22
5. AP	2.36	1.05	.97	1.02	197.43	.31
6. AV	1.07	.73	2.49	.92	323.61	.42
7. AP	2.74	.91	1.25	.95	280.59	.39
8. AV	.81	.74	1.99	1.02	196.48	.31
9. AP	2.72	.92	1.14	.95	313.73	.42
10. AV	.25	.60	.63	.90	28.58	.06
11. AP	2.80	.86	.98	.88	477.63	.52
12. AV	.60	.75	1.15	1.04	40.47	.08
13. AP	2.31	1.04	2.00	1.07	10.08	.02
14. AV	.85	.74	2.44	.97	376.56	.46
15. AP	3.02	.83	1.06	.96	526.58	.54
16. AP	3.16	.73	.86	.91	854.47	.66
17. AP	3.10	.62	2.82	.81	17.17	.04
18. AP	3.05	.89	2.32	1.02	65.57	.13
19. AP	3.12	.75	1.00	.94	692.75	.61

Note: All F-values were significant at the .0001 level except for item 13 which was significant at the .001 level.
Scale: 0=Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Occasionally, 3=Often, 4=Very Often

Reflected 14-Item Totals	M	SD	Min.	Max.	Range
Approach Condition	40.48	6.21	22.0	54.0	0-56
Avoidance Condition	19.63	8.99	2.0	50.0	0-56

Table 2

Unrotated Factor Loadings of Final 14 Approach/Avoidance Items

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2
1	.71	.16
3	.68	.47
4	-.62	.58
5	.80	.17
6	-.82	.06
7	.85	.16
8	-.65	.56
9	.87	.17
11	.88	.13
14	-.73	.24
15	.90	.08
16	.90	.11
18	.51	-.46
19	.90	.05

Table 3

Simple Correlations of Approach/Avoidance Verbal Strategies/Messages and Communication Variables

Item	Communication Variables			Unreflected Total /19	Reflected Total/14
	Assertiveness	Responsiveness	WTC		
1. AP	-.04	.08	.02	.63*	.71*
2. AV	-.03	-.24*	-.11***	.02	.34*
3. AP	-.06	.08	.01	.72*	.67*
4. AV	.07	-.25*	-.05	-.13***	.63*
5. AP	-.03	.23*	.01	.71*	.80*
6. AV	.07	-.18*	-.07	-.52*	.81*
7. AP	-.08	.19*	.03	.74*	.85*
8. AV	.13***	-.19*	-.08	-.18*	.66*
9. AP	-.06	.18*	.09***	.77*	.86*
10. AV	.20*	-.20*	-.06	.14***	.27*
11. AP	-.08	.11***	.02	.78*	.87*
12. AV	.13***	-.22*	-.07	.12***	.37*
13. AP	.09***	-.10***	-.01	.40*	.15**
14. AV	.14***	-.18**	-.01	-.33*	.74*
15. AP	-.09***	.17**	.02	.76*	.90*
16. AP	-.08	.13***	.01	.77*	.89*
17. AP	.04	.18**	.13***	.26*	.32*
18. AP	-.04	.14***	.08	.35*	.52*
19. AP	-.10***	.13***	.03	.74*	.90*
Total/19	-.00	.04	.01	1.00	.99*
Total/14	-.10***	.20*	.05	.99*	1.00

Note: *p < .0001 **p < .001 ***p < .05